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veterinary economics

THE MAGAZINE OF PRACTICE MANAGEMENT AND FINANCE

HOW

TO TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR PRACTICE
TO WRITE A BUSINESS PLAN
TO MAKE MORE MONEY
TO FIND AND KEEP A GOOD RECEPTIONIST
TO BUILD A PROFITABLE NUTRITION PROGRAM
TO COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR EMPLOYEES
***NOT* TO PROMOTE THE PROFESSION**

veterinary economics

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MEMO FROM THE EDITOR

Hello, this is Katie . . .

The phones in our office ring all day long. Many of the calls are from veterinarians; most of the conversations begin, "I was wondering if you could give me some information on how to . . ." Before they say much more, their calls are transferred to Katie Cyr. In her nearly three years with the magazine, she's become an expert in "how to," fielding questions on nearly every management topic under the sun.

As associate editor of the magazine, Katie has a more-than-full-time job before the phone even rings. She is a top-notch editor, writer, and deadline whiz who somehow juggles the phone calls in the midst of everything else. I suspect she could come into your practice and whip everything into shape in nothing flat: You'd be organized, your clients would be happy, and Katie would still be smiling.

Before you call to offer her a job, however, you need to know that Katie is just about to marry Dan, a dentist; he's going to whisk her off to Atchison, Kan., where they'll live in a neat old house they've been remodeling. Katie won't be here to answer your calls anymore, but she will continue to do as much editing and writing as we can send up to Atchison with her.

This issue of the magazine is probably a relief to Katie, not only because it's her last on the way to the altar, but because it represents so much of what she's been telling us since she began: The veterinarians who call or write, she says, want *practical, hands-on, how-to information on management.* Her reminders have guided us all along, but if you want a hefty dose of "how-to," you've come to the right place.

The next time you call, you're likely to reach our new assistant editor, Renée Anderson. As Katie did, she'll be able to listen and empathize, send you back-articles, and refer you to our consultants. Keep in mind that we're editors, not management advisors, and that our deadlines sometimes keep us from handling your questions immediately. We will, however, do everything we can to help.

I hope you'll join me in welcoming Renée (please, not too many calls right away—we don't want to scare her off!), and in wishing Katie and Dan all the best. They deserve it.

Becky Turner

Rebecca R. Turner

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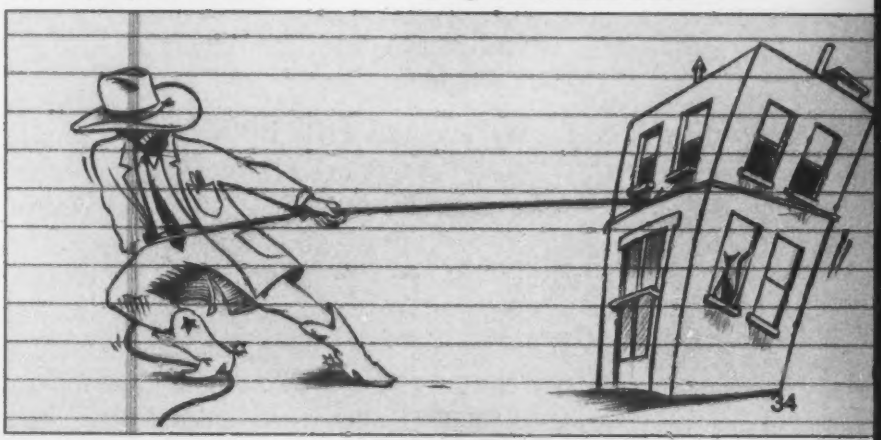

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HOW TO . . . BUILD A PROFITABLE NUTRITION PROGRAM

Yes, it takes time to teach your clients about nutrition. And no, they're not going to listen every time. But the payoffs outweigh the drawbacks in good medicine, client loyalty, and revenue.

By Paris J. Revoir, DVM

My professional career recently came full circle. After practicing for a number of years, then spending several years in the pet food industry, I've come back to practice. All of a sudden, I've found myself face-to-face with a difficult question: Can I actually practice the nutrition I've been preaching to veterinarians around the country these past few years?

I've discovered the answer is "yes." Nutrition has played an important role in our practice from the minute we opened our doors. In fact, the greatest traffic we've seen comes from concerned pet owners in search of nutrition education. It only makes sense that these same clients come into the practice looking for high-quality medical care as well.

The process of converting pet owners to nutrition advocates to loyal clients is time-consuming, but well worth the effort. I'll describe how we do it below. But first, to give you a picture of our practice: We have a rather extensive retail area, stocked with several quality pet foods. We carry a selection of popular major brands—those that clients walk in and request as a result of the food companies' national advertising campaigns. We also offer other carefully selected and competitively priced brands.

Every brand we recommend and offer in our practice has been strategically selected, based on my knowledge of the many products in the pet food industry. It shouldn't take much time to figure out the best strategic mix of pet foods to offer your practice community—if you're willing to take time to visit with sales representatives from the different companies. I suggest you research the attributes *and* the shortcomings of a variety of brands.

What happens when a client requests a brand we don't carry? We offer him or her an alternative choice that, in my experience, is of similar quality, but more cost-effective to feed. And with a veterinary-based recommendation that reflects our concern both for the pet's needs and the owner's pocketbook, it isn't difficult to convert the client to these alternative pet food brands.

The "conversion" not only helps such clients' animals, it brings them back to our practice as many as 12 times per year. In fact, my ultimate goal is to have nine out

THE AUTHOR, a 1981 graduate of Michigan State University, is co-owner of PetWorks, a small animal practice in Overland Park, Kan.

of every 10 clients buying their pet foods from our practice. To make that possible, we provide a continuum of products that can be recommended for any feeding condition or philosophy.

Client encounters

I try to talk nutrition to each and every client who enters our practice. My goal: To identify the best product for their pet. I begin by asking each new client what product he or she is currently feeding. If it's one of the brands we carry, and all is well in the client's mind, I drop the subject and move on. If it's a brand we don't carry, I offer a similar-quality product at a more attractive price.

Our staff members and I also *listen* to what our clients tell us about how their pets perform on various products. Palatability, stool volume and consistency, and skin and haircoat condition are the easiest parameters to evaluate clinically. Our clients seem to truly appreciate the time we spend discussing nutrition.

A consistent message

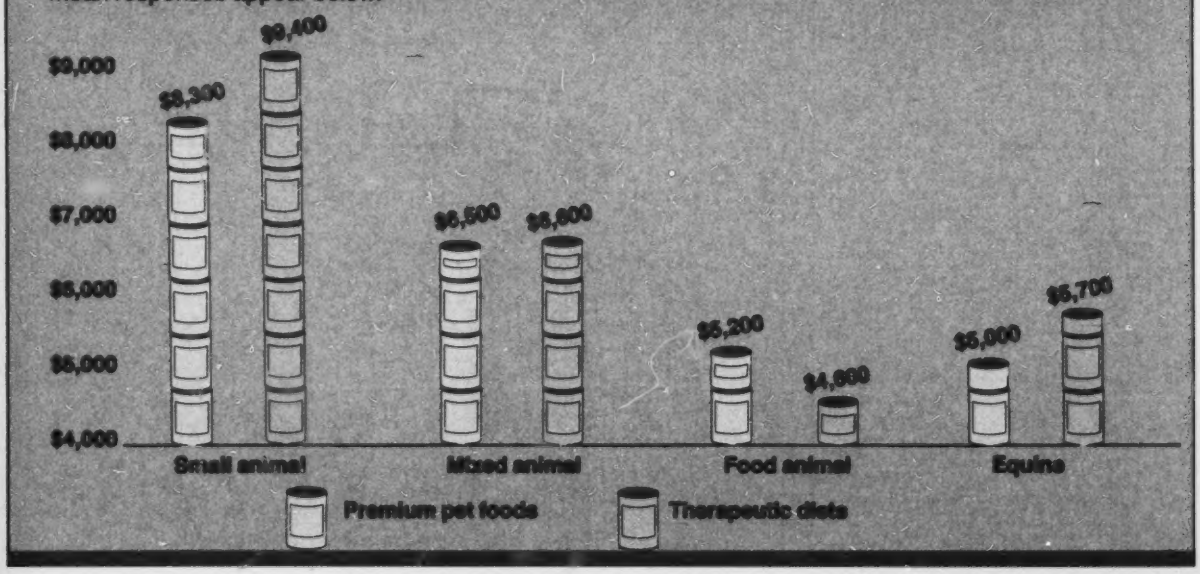
To make sure that your clients aren't getting mixed messages from your practice, it's important that you and your staff provide consistent information on nutrition. That makes "quality control" an important part of your job. To help you out, most manufacturers are happy to provide continuing in-house training programs to inform your staff of the features and benefits of their products. Ample quantities of literature are available as well.

Overcoming the obstacles

As an industry representative, the biggest complaint I used to hear from practitioners was that they didn't have the space to store bulky pet foods. I suspect that some of them simply didn't want to get involved in nutrition, but I do understand the space dilemma better now that I'm in practice. I

HOW MUCH DO YOU SPEND ON PET FOODS?

In response to a survey conducted by Signet Research of Cliffside Park, N.J., 513 veterinarians reported how much their clinics spend each year on premium pet foods and therapeutic diets for resale. Their mean responses appear below.



also see the necessity and value of being creative. We, for example, store our therapeutic diets in the back room on a two-tier steel table we procured from a restaurant that was going out of business. The table fits along the half-wall in front of our employee lounge —a space I'd never really noticed before.

As you plan or analyze your potential storage areas, carefully consider the space you give to non-profit-producing decor: aquariums, plants, and so on. While you probably don't want to strip the place bare, keep in mind that some of the space *could* hold hundreds of pounds of pet food. Consider, too, the shelving units that most manufacturers offer. With proper inventory control and the high level of service most distributors provide, even a small amount of space can turn literally thousands of pounds a month.

Most veterinarians also worry about being perceived as "dog food salesmen." It's important to note, however, that more and more clients *want* nutrition counseling; they *want* to know the best food to feed their pets. They welcome our recommendations. And they prefer our professional advice over that they're likely to get from a pimpley-faced kid at the grocery or pet store. I believe we as veterinarians owe our clients accurate, medically correct information. The ultimate beneficiary, of course, is the pet.

Another obstacle veterinarians perceive: The low profit margin generated by pet food sales. I recommend, however, that you look beyond the margin to the larger benefits: improved client traffic and loyalty, and the opportunity to interact with your clients more frequently. Our "target market" of concerned pet owners is walking through our front door begging for information on nutrition. In responding to these client needs, we enhance the perception of our *entire* practice.

In making a decision about the amount of time and space you want to devote to nutrition, keep in mind the impact on your practice as a whole. What else will bring clients in your door every month? Such frequent visits can increase your bond with clients, and allow you to better monitor the health of your patients. ■

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(diethylcarbamazine citrate/oxibendazole)

Warning: 'Filaribits Plus' (diethylcarbamazine citrate/oxibendazole) Chewable Tablets have been occasionally associated with hepatic toxicity including several fatalities. Close monitoring of animals receiving this drug may identify early hepatic injury. The hepatic injury has usually been reversible upon discontinuation of 'Filaribits Plus' administration; thus dogs exhibiting signs of hepatic dysfunction should be removed from treatment immediately. Dogs with a history of liver disease or dogs receiving 'Filaribits Plus' concurrently with other potentially hepatotoxic drugs should be carefully monitored for clinical or biochemical evidence of hepatic disease.

Filaribits Plus® (brand of diethylcarbamazine citrate/oxibendazole) Chewable Tablets For Veterinary Use Only **Composition:** Each 60 mg/45 mg 'Filaribits Plus' tablet contains 60 mg diethylcarbamazine citrate and 45.56 mg oxibendazole. Each 180 mg/136 mg 'Filaribits Plus' tablet contains 180 mg diethylcarbamazine citrate and 136.1 mg oxibendazole. **Indications:** 'Filaribits Plus' are indicated for use in the prevention of infection with ***Dirofilaria immitis*** (heartworm disease) and ***Ancylostoma caninum*** (hookworm infection), in dogs. 'Filaribits Plus' are also indicated for removal and control of ***Trichuris vulpis*** (whipworm infection) and mature and immature stages of intestinal ***Toxocara canis*** (ascarid infection) in dogs. 'Filaribits Plus' may be given to dogs of all ages, including bitches, throughout the reproductive period and following whelping. **Warning:** See Warning box regarding hepatic toxicity. Dogs with established heartworm and/or hookworm infection should not receive 'Filaribits Plus' until they have been converted to a negative status by the use of appropriate adulticidal and microfilaricidal heartworm therapy and/or hookworm therapy. A dog on prophylactic therapy should be examined for the presence of heartworm microfilaria every six months. **Precautions and Side Effects:** Occasionally in dogs, hepatic dysfunction, sometimes fatal, has been reported with the use of 'Filaribits Plus.' *Clients should be instructed to report any signs and symptoms which may suggest hepatic dysfunction so that appropriate biochemical testing can be done. Signs and symptoms reported as accompanying hepatic dysfunction include anorexia, vomiting, lethargy, jaundice, weight loss, polydipsia, polyuria, ataxia and dark urine.* The use of diethylcarbamazine citrate is not recommended in dogs with active ***Dirofilaria immitis*** infections. Inadvertent administration to heartworm infected dogs may cause adverse reactions due to pulmonary occlusion. Overdosage may cause emesis. **Caution:** U.S. Federal law restricts this drug to use by or on the order of a licensed veterinarian. *Do not use in dogs that may be harboring adult heartworms.* KEEP OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN. For Veterinary Use Only.

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"Stop feeding him scraps from *your* table!"